

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PANAMA 000337

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [EAID](#) [OTRA](#) [PM](#)

SUBJECT: PANAMA COUNTRY CLEARANCE GRANTED FOR USDOL/ILAB  
GARY RUSSELL AND RODOLFO PIZA

REF: STATE 26841

1. Embassy grants country clearance and welcomes USDOL/ILAB Gary Russell, Acting Director, Office of Foreign Relations (OFR), and contractor Rodolfo Piza, Project Director, USDOL funded Cumple y Gana Project, who will visit Panama during February 16-17, 2005 to participate in the project kickoff.

2. Embassy Point of Contact for this visit is Political Officer Debra Steigerwalt, telephones: office (507) 207-7183, residence (507) 321-0742, cell (507) 616-5271; email: SteigerwaltDA@state.gov.

3. Per separate email correspondence from USDOL/ILAB, Embassy understands that hotel and transportation assistance is not required for Mr. Piza.

4. A reservation for February 16 has been made for Mr. Russell at the Caesar Park Hotel, telephone (507) 270-0477, and fax (507) 226-0116, at a rate of 110 USD per night, plus 10 percent tax. Confirmation number is 539797. Embassy travel office has arranged for Peasantez Tours to provide transportation to and from Tocumen International Airport on February 16 and 17 for Mr. Russell. The fare is 24 USD each way, payable in cash to the driver.

5. Use taxis for transportation between the Embassy and the hotel unless other arrangements are made. Taxis in Panama do not use meters and fares should be agreed upon in advance. Taxis are generally reliable within Panama City and cost less than 2 USD for most locations.

6. The American embassy in Panama has two principal locations, the Chancery on Avenida Balboa at Calle 37 and the Clayton Building on Demetrio Basilio Lakas Street (former Building 520, Clayton. Note: when taking a taxi to the Embassy, please be sure to specify the exact address where you intend to go. If your business is in the Chancery, you should ask to be taken to the Balboa Avenue location. The Consular Section, FCS, MGT, PD, and CIS (former INS) are located on Demetrio B. Lakas Street, Clayton. Taxi drivers have sometimes taken our visitors to the Clayton Building when in fact they want to go to the Chancery. The Embassy telephone number is: (country code-507) 207-7000, during duty hours. After duty hours the telephone number is (507) 207-7200.

7. U.S. currency is accepted in Panama and major credit cards are widely accepted. However, visitors are warned that large denomination bills (50 USD and larger) are often scrutinized carefully or refused due to counterfeiting fears.

8. During the May to December rainy season, Panama City experiences heavy rain most days, often with brief flooding of streets or walkways. During the rest of the year rains are less frequent. Temperatures are always warm. Travelers are advised to pack accordingly.

9. All official USG travelers to Panama should enter on passports with appropriate diplomatic or official visas.

10. Normally all travelers departing from Tocumen International must pay a \$20 user fee. However, officials accredited to the Embassy are exempt.

11. Security assessment: there is no specific information to indicate official or private American travelers to Panama are targeted by criminals or terrorists. Criminal statistics indicate a steady increase in drug use and related criminal activity to include robbery, assault, auto theft, larceny, and sexual assault. The emergence and establishment of youth gangs in specific areas of Panama City and Colon, is consistent with the proliferation of illegal weapons and related activity. Armed violence in the metropolitan areas is not uncommon and a curfew enacted for juveniles remains in place. Police checkpoints have become commonplace on weekends in Panama City and Colon. Based upon reported incidents, the high crime areas around Panama City are: Chorillo, Ancon, Curundu, Rio Abajo, Veracruz Beach, Panama Viejo and the Madden Dam overlook. In addition, U.S. citizens should exercise caution when visiting the campus of the University of Panama. Despite improved policing and more police officer visibility on the streets during business hours, urban and organized crime

continue to be a major problem. The border region of Panama and Colombia, the Darien, has become increasingly unstable and violent due to narcotics trafficking and spillover from the Colombian civil conflict. All travel for official Americans to the area is restricted. Advice to American travelers: exercise good personal security practices and always be aware of your surrounding environment. Minimize the amount of cash, credit cards, jewelry and other personal valuables you carry with you and avoid going out alone, particularly after dark. Choose restaurants and establishments that have adequate security. Radio taxis are safe and recommended. Contact the RSO to report any security-related incident. For updated security information, contact the U.S. Embassy's Consular Section.

WATT